

11 September 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Executive Assistant

SUBJECT: The Fast Track

1. The term "fast track" is used frequently and fairly loosely in CIA. No one really understands what that means or how to get on the fast track or, in some cases, to know whether you are even on the fast track. To the extent that senior officer development depends on identifying people on the fast track and also those who have been so selected knowing that they are on the fast track, it would seem to me essential that there be some criteria for objective standards within each Directorate for the fast track.

2. Based on my observations in recent years and conversations with a wide range of managers and employees, I strongly believe that the fast track today is entirely subjective. It is in fact no more than a different name for the old system of patron-protégé that has existed in all bureaucracies probably through all time. My own case is illustrative. As the youngest supergrade in CIA, I am presumably on a fast track. Yet no one ever told me I was on a fast track or that I was being considered for senior management positions in NFAC. Indeed, to a large extent I believe I am on a fast track because I put myself there. I have worked outside of a normal line office for the last nine years. In each case I worked for a very senior and powerful individual, either within the Agency or within the government, who exerted themselves to insure that in each stage I was promoted as quickly as possible. But, there was no overall plan; the Directorate certainly never had a plan; to this day I have never been advised by NFAC what my career track would look like after this job or on down the road for even as few as three or four years.

3. I believe this experience is typical. People on the fast track are those who have impressed a Division/Office Chief or Deputy Director and have been brought along by that individual as long as the employee was under the supervision of that senior official. This is what generally gets someone on the fast track. In short, being on the fast track is not the result of a considered judgment of a career service panel or of a meeting of senior officials who identify an individual as having exceptional skill or competence, but rather the result of a highly subjective approach based on a patron-protégé relationship generally during the GS-13-15 phase of one's career. Thus, in the eyes of most employees, those who are considered by senior managers to be

on the fast track are considered by other employees simply to be "golden boys"--those who have found favor for one reason or another in the eyes of a single senior manager.

4. If we are serious about senior officer development, the whole notion of the fast track should be rationalized and given some objective standards. These need not be common to the entire Agency, but there must be some feeling on the part of the employees that each employee has an equal opportunity to get on the fast track and that, indeed, competence and skill are the primary criteria for being selected--not finding favor in the eyes of one supervisor. It might be worth your pursuing at the next Deputies' meeting by asking each of the Deputies to describe for you in a very brief piece of paper who they determine who should be on the fast track and how the process works within each of their Directorates. This could then be the basis for further discussion of the question. I raise this because of the considerable discussion of the fast track as part of the senior officer development program in recent months and what I perceive to be a general feeling (and resentment) on the part of a large number of employees about how one gets on the fast track.